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## CHILD LABOR A NATIONAL PROBLEM

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The evils of child labor cannot well be exaggerated. Neither can they be quantitatively measured with any precision. I would like to have accurate statistics of child labor in the United States, which we have not got so far, but it makes comparatively little difference whether a million and a half or two million and a half children of tender years are at work. It is fundamentally wrong, it is a contradiction of the basic principles of this free republic that upon the shoulders of any child who has not attained its full, mature, physical development, who has not enjoyed a reasonable time in which to play, and who has not received an elementary English education, there should be put the smallest fraction of the burdens of our modern competitive industrial life. Viewed in the light of our advancing civilization and its greater opportunity for growth and human service, and also its greater demands for preparation for lives of highest usefulness, I say again, the evils of child labor cannot well be exaggerated. Dr. Felix Adler, the chairman of our National Committee, has truly said that these evils are increasing. The demand for cheap labor, which so often means infant labor, increases with the growth of competition for markets and the consequent desire to sell goods more cheaply. The demand for such labor as children can perform increases often with the progress of inventions and mechanical devices. Not long ago I had my attention called to the advertisement of a manufacturer of mill machinery, and one of the attractions of his machines was that they were adapted to the use of very small children. When we go down South we are told by prominent manufacturers that they cannot get along without children in their mills because the machines cannot very well be operated by adults. These are some of the arguments that we meet in every State when we ask for legislation to prevent child labor. The

very greed of modern capitalists demands the labor of the child in order that they may have the largest profits. Likewise the greed of incapable, ignorant and avaricious parents and the indifference of others demands the right to put the child to work in order that they be relieved of responsibility for his education and control, and may live off the pennies the child can earn. How blind even the natural parent may be when he sees in his child a possibility of profit, is seen when he is willing to sacrifice the future of his child without any thought of the to-morrow when the child will be a man and should be fit to bear his share of the work of the world.

Our standards of living, our tests of efficiency and of industrial fitness as well as our educational opportunities have increased at a rapid rate in the last few years. So much greater, therefore is the wrong that is done to the children who are deprived of even the ordinary opportunities to prepare for the greater demands of the future when they reach the years of adult life. Child labor in America means that as a nation we are deliberately breeding social inequality and striking at the roots of democracy. Ostrich fashion, we only bury our heads in the sands of the temporary excuses—that of industrial necessity, or the poverty of parents, or the absurd fallacy that we are giving an industrial education to the child worker—when we refuse to look squarely in the face the inevitable consequences of our madness and our racial folly.

The problem which the gainful employment of two million children under sixteen years of age to-day presents to the American people is a national problem of the first magnitude. It has to do primarily with a question of race development. What these two million children are now and will be twenty years hence raises questions which are fundamental for the welfare of the human stock and for the happiness of this land of ours. Industrial processes like the processes of nature have what the biologists call "selective values." They weed out the unfit and incompetent workers and segregate them into the slums of our large cities where society must bear the burden and pay the cost. I know of no better illustration of this selective aggregation of the industrially worn-out than is presented by the great problem of the unemployed in London to-day. While in England last summer I was surprised to hear from the lips of members of Parliament, who were not given to exaggeration, that there

were from eight hundred thousand to one million persons, many of them able-bodied men, out of work at a season of the year when employment is usually abundant. It was said that a very large number of them were simply inefficient, unfit for any industrial work under the demands of modern industry. What chapters of English history do you recall when you are told that in the city of London thousands of men, women and children are segregated in East London, living in dire poverty and distress, because they do not possess the physical vitality or intellectual capacity to perform the kind of labor demanded in modern society. A very shrewd journalist who knew probably little about the theories of race development, said:

"There has been evolved in London a race distinct, unlike any other race in the British Islands, with strongly marked characteristics, with alien features and habits. It is a race stunted in size, sallow complexioned, dark haired. Its moral sense is blunted, its mentality is low. It has even evolved a speech of its own."

In a few sharp sentences this journalist has drawn for us a picture of what the neglect and non-development of children in the past means for the British people to-day. If that picture allows any reasonable doubt concerning the causes of physical deterioration in England about which the whole nation was so aroused during the Boer war that a voluminous government report was made on the subject, he who reads the history of England must surely admit that the system of child labor which prevailed for a century has been the one great contributory cause. This is the fate that awaits us also in America in the no distant to-morrow if we fail to grapple with the great problem of child labor in our own country until we have abolished its evils.

Child labor is a national problem, in the second place, because our industrial processes have become national and international. The glass workers of New Jersey oppose any attempt to prohibit the night work of boys under sixteen on the ground that such work is permitted in the neighboring State of Pennsylvania. Some people in Georgia seem to think that they cannot afford to place any restrictions upon their cotton manufacturers, because they are just making a good start in competition with New England and the rest of the world in cotton manufacturing and they want to enjoy every

advantage they possess, even that of killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

And so it goes, from State to State. We have constantly to meet questions arising from interstate competition. Then in other States we have the phenomena of peoples passing from the agricultural to the manufacturing stage of development with all the attendant changes in their social, moral and economic life. States in this transition stage from the simpler communal life of the agriculturist to the more complex and individualistic life of a manufacturing community must be protected from the new dangers which the experience of older States can point out. So again we see the interstate character of our child labor problem. The National Child Labor Committee came into being for the purpose of meeting this situation and helping States that are just beginning to take notice of the evils of child labor by bringing to their attention the results of the neglect of childhood or the wilful misuse of their children in those States that have already paid too high a price for their industrial progress. If we can in any way bring these lessons home so as to influence public opinion in the States that have little or no protection for childhood we may hope for an American standard of protection that shall apply all over this country. Such a standard when attained can be made effective in all our States only when public opinion is uniformly aroused and our captains of industry are told that they may compete with their money, with their brains and ingenuity, and with their machines, but not with human life, least of all with the child's life. Only when a true American standard of protection is thrown around every American child and the opportunities of education and physical development are guaranteed to all alike, to the "carrying-in boys" in the glass houses of New Jersey, to the "breaker boys" in the mines of Pennsylvania, to the "doffers" in the cotton mills in the Carolinas and Georgia, and to the little street traders in our large cities, will the dream of democracy be a reality.

The problem of child labor is a national problem, in the third place, because the responsibility for it rests upon the consumers and purchasers of goods made with the aid of the work of young children, whether the purchaser and consumer lives in a manufacturing State or in an agricultural community, in Georgia or California. With

the extension of our system of manufacturing and the conditions brought about by world markets you and I cannot very well avoid some participation in these evils so long as we are buyers of American made goods; and we cannot more surely or reasonably satisfy our consciences that we are not the oppressors, the real oppressors of these little children until we are satisfied that this American standard of protection reaches out over all the children and through all the industries of our American States. We are then individually and collectively accountable for the American standard or lack of standard of protection of childhood. A national sentiment must, and can be made effective according as the different conditions and problems presented in each State and territory are met and solved in the light of the best legislation and enforcement of child labor laws not the poorest.

The movement to bring this to pass is not without some signs of encouragement. During the past year thirty-nine State legislatures were in session and in fifteen of these the child labor issue was a prominent issue. In twelve of the fifteen States to which reference is made new or amended child labor laws were enacted. Delaware for the first time was removed from that blacklist of States that give the child no protection, and now Georgia stands almost alone in the shame and cruelty indicated by absence of any legislation. In addition to the legislation obtained, new forces to speak for the child have been aroused. Fourteen State Child Labor Committees are now working for better laws and better enforcement. They are composed of representative men and women in all the leading States, and usually contain members who represent the labor unions, the manufacturers, the churches, the women's clubs, the school officials and all the various interests that can be rallied in a reform that differs from any ordinary reform or charity in that it stands for something in which all can unite. Three of these State committees were organized before our national committee came into existence. And this work is going on. During this winter of 1905-06 nineteen State legislatures are in session. It is what politicians call an "off year," but in many of these legislatures, practically for the first time, an effort is being made to have a child labor law enacted that can be really enforced.

In conclusion, let us remember that no child labor law has in

itself any self-acting principle. Such legislation does not enforce itself. Child labor laws need back of them first of all enlightened public opinion, which the humblest citizen of the republic and every citizen may help to create. They need back of them well-trained and efficient public officials who are not controlled by political influence, but who will rigidly enforce the law. Right-minded officials require liberal appropriations for the work. Even greater than these is the responsibility which a child labor law, to be really efficient, to be a real benefit to the community, places upon the educational machinery of the State. Good, compulsory education laws, well enforced, and schools properly equipped to meet the needs of all the classes of the community, schools that will train the hand and eye and mind, that assume responsibility for all the children of the community, inspect their welfare in their homes and provide for intelligent direction of all their activities, are the essential and inevitable consequences of wise child labor legislation. Such schools and such care for the children of the State are the surest guarantees of industrial prosperity, social progress and peace; their absence spells race suicide and national degeneration.